# Ross-on-Wye Town Council's Tourism Strategy

Summer 2025

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# Introduction

This Tourism Strategy seeks to review Ross-on-Wye as a tourist destination and outline a course of actions for its development. To do this, it reviews the tourism offer in surrounding market towns (including their transport links, markets etc) and their use of social media to promote this.

An action plan, including both immediate and future projects, has been outlined below and will be consulted when relevant committees and officers consider possible events.

# Competitor review

## Review of market towns in Herefordshire

| **Town** | **Highlights identified by Visit Herefordshire** | **Markets** | **Notes** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bromyard | Traditional high street with independent shops<br>Fantastic local food producers<br>Rich history of hop-growing, cider-making & blacksmithing<br>Flair for festivals<br>Easy to access walks & wildlife | | Bromyard FM<br>Unique tourist attractions e.g. History Centre and science history museum<br>Known as the 'town of festivals' with Bromyard Art Walk, folk, scarecrow, pride and speed festival etc<br>Attractive building architecture with half-timbered buildings |
| Kington | Gorgeous location, only minutes from the hills<br>Endless walking routes<br>Fab cafes & deli<br>Easy drive to Leominster & Hay-on-Wye<br>Ideal base for the Black & White Villages trail | Every Friday<br><br>Craft markets every 3rd Saturday of the month including a repair café ran by KLEEN | Has a T.I.C.<br>Attractions e.g. Hergest Crofts Gardens & Small Breeds Farm<br>Named a 'centre of walking' with annual Kington Walks Festival |

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|---|---|---|---|
| Leominster | - | Every Friday<br><br>Farmers market every 2nd Saturday of the month<br><br>Annual Food Fayre on 1st Saturday of September | Annual Victorian Street Market on 2nd Saturday of December<br>Interactive/guided tourist activities e.g. history museum and 90 min heritage guided tours which are offered twice a week (£5pp)<br>Train station |
| Ledbury | | Tuesday & Saturday | Has a train station<br>Attractions e.g. Market House, Eastnor Castle<br>Annual poetry festival |
| Hereford City | Explore all corners of the county from its historic heart<br>Enjoy lively independent shopping<br>Stay at fabulous historic hotels<br>Relax on riverside strolls<br>Discover vibrant cultural life | Retail market every Wednesday & Saturday<br><br>Produce & craft market every 3rd Thursday & 1st Saturday of each month<br><br>Annual Christmas markets on Fridays & Sundays in December<br><br>Hosts external vegan market twice a year | Has a T.I.C. & train station<br>Attractions e.g. cathedral, Weir Garden, Chained Library exhibitions |

## Review of market town in surrounding counties

| Town | Markets | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| **Hay-on-Wye,** Herefordshire | Every Thursday<br><br>Monthly on 1st Saturdays in April to October | Annual literature festival (smaller weekend literature festival in the winter)<br>Known as first book town in the world<br>Hay Castle is open to the public, holds exhibitions etc<br>Multiple popular wedding venues e.g. The Globe, Hay Castle |

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|---|---|---|
| | | Website, Facebook and Instagram pages for Hay Markets (7.4 followers on Facebook and 8.4k on Instagram)<br>Branded souvenirs for market visitors e.g. tote bag |
| **Monmouth,** Monmouthshire | Every Friday & Saturday | UK's first Bee Town<br>Attractions e.g. Rockfield studios, 13th century gatehouse bridge<br>Facebook page for Monmouthshire markets including Caldicot, Monmouth & Abergavenny (1.2k followers)<br>Has a T.I.C. in Shire Hall with souvenirs on sale |
| **Chepstow,** Monmouthshire | Market on the 4th Sunday of each month (outsourced, first plastic free market in Wales)<br>External vegan market organiser hosts in town centre twice a year | Train station<br>Chepstow Castle (hosts weddings, outdoor theatre shows, events etc)<br>Has a T.I.C |
| **Coleford,** Gloucestershire | None | Annual summer music festival<br>Annual antique car show<br>Popular tourist sites e.g. Puzzlewood, Perrygrove Railway<br>Has a T.I.C. |
| **Abergavenny,** Monmouthshire | Tuesdays, Fridays, & Saturdays<br><br>Themed markets once a month | Annual weekend food festival<br>Train station<br>Has a T.I.C in the Town Hall<br>See note above regarding market promotion<br>Has its own market Instagram page (3k followers) |
| **Frome,** Somerset | Every Wednesday & Saturday | Town hall is a registered venue for weddings etc<br>Multiple accolades as a place to visit or live in the Southwest and Britain<br>Established annual calendar of events e.g. Frome Festival and Christmas light lantern parade<br>Train Station<br>Has a T.I.C<br>2 phase project to make the town centre more pedestrian friendly e.g. removal of street clutter, realignment of bus stops to minimise congestion |
| **Stroud**, Gloucestershire | Every Saturday | Train station<br>Market has been awarded Best Farmers' Market in the UK twice |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Database of traders & their contact details available on their website<br>Has Discover Stroud Trails app |
| **Gloucester,** Gloucestershire | Every Friday | Train & bus station<br>Has a T.I.C<br>Outdoor cinema at the Priory<br>Variety of museums including National Waterways Museum, Beatrix Potter Museum & Jet Age Museum |
| **Stratford-upon-Avon,** Warwickshire | Charter market every Friday<br><br>Urban mix market every Saturday<br><br>Market between March and December on Sundays and BH Mondays | Train station<br>Attractions focusing on the area as Shakespeare's birthplace<br>Has an accessible tourist guide<br>Has a T.I.C |
| **St Albans,** Hertfordshire | External vegan market organiser hosts in town centre twice a year | High street is pedestrianised from 11am Saturday to 7am Monday<br>Museum and gallery with guided tours<br>Volunteer tour guides offer 6 different guided talks (all undertake training course)<br>Hosts external vegan market<br>Train station<br>Has a T.I.C in the museum |
| **Cheltenham,** Gloucestershire | External vegan market organiser hosts in town centre twice a year | Train station<br>Annual literary and poetry festivals<br>Hosts Vegan Market twice a year and Continental Food Market<br>Promenade is pedestrianised<br>Has a T.I.C |
| **Keswick,** Cumbria | Every Thursday and Saturday | Has town centre webcam<br>Market square is pedestrianised<br>2 large public parks with BMX facilities, crazy golf etc<br>Regular guided themed/historical walks<br>Has a T.I.C |

# An analysis of Ross

## 2025 Potential Pedestrianisation Feasibility Study

The Feasibility Study identifies several aspects of the Town Centre that could be improved upon to better both the pedestrian experience (to encourage higher repeat visits and dwell time) and the town's appeal to visitors. This includes minimal greenery, street furniture clutter, limited car parking signs or bike storage.

The Study notes that Ross has good road links to the Midlands and Birmingham via the M50. So, the instillation of brown signage (such as the Market House as a Scheduled Ancient Monument) on major/busy surrounding roads may increase awareness of the town as a tourist destination.

Accessible here - https://www.rosstc-herefordshire.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Feasibility-Study-FINAL-Report-150425_compressed.pdf

## Visit Herefordshire's Destination Management Plan

- 11,000 population
- 5m day visitors and 900,000 overnight visitors to the county
    - Social media promotion should focus on day trips and weekend itineraries
- Majority of visitors to Hereford and the 5 market towns are 45+
- Ross's dwell time is an average of 51 minutes in 2024, the highest of all Market Towns and close to Hereford with 52 minutes
- 61% of Ross's visitors in 2024 were from the West Midlands, followed by 29.2% from the Southwest
- Ross has 4 hotels and 125 rooms, most of any other town in the county and 2nd to Hereford City (information taken from 2019-2023 STEAM report on Herefordshire)

Accessible here - https://www.herefordshirecountybid.co.uk/app/uploads/2025/04/Herefordshire-DMP-2025-V5.pdf

## Monthly market town Place Informatics reports

| | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 YTD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Annual footfall | 3,837,905 | 3,851,626 | 3,830,278 | |
| Unique visitors | 423,125 | 428,125 | 423,880 | |
| Month with highest footfall | | July – 339,295 | July – 338,476 | April - 324,113 |
| Month with highest unique visitors | | July – 37,883 | July – 37,433 | |
| Month with lowest footfall | | December – 310,001 | December – 309,977 | January - 318,382 |
| Month with lowest unique visitors | | January – 33,965 | January – 34,372 | |

Unique visitor – one person visiting the site during the month. A unique visitor can visit multiple times which is calculated as footfall.

Catchment population – postcode catchment categories (primary, secondary and tertiary) are based on the distance of a visitor's postcode from the data area

- ¼ of catchment population are visiting the data area each month, suggesting locals are choosing to attend markets and events or do their regular shopping elsewhere (or online).
    - Need to encourage residents to shop locally and support the high street and weekly markets to ensure stability
- 38-41% of footfall is from our primary catchment area each month (i.e. nearby areas rather than further afield).
- December has the lowest month of footfall in 2024 regardless of the annual Christmas Fayre being on the 1st of the month (event footfall of 9,566). This is likely due to the poor weather that followed, the popularity of online Christmas shopping or nearby cities offering consistent Christmas attractions across the month and a wider shopping offering e.g. Hereford, Gloucester, Cribbs Causeway, Birmingham.
- July has consistently had both the highest footfall and unique visitors, likely due to the school year closing and local families visiting the data area for casual shopping and riverside events (such as Proms), prior to travelling abroad in the later part of the summer holidays

- Need to promote Ross as a 'staycation' destination for couples and families in spring and summer

- Data area does not include Rope Walk, so will not include those that visited events such as the pop-up beach in summer 2024, use of Homs Road car park or the Rowing Club and not visited the Town Centre in the same visit
- 2025 has had the highest footfall in January since data has been recorded (2023)
- Annual footfall is higher 2025 YTD in comparison with 2024

## Analysis of Visit Ross social media engagement

Figures are as of 29th July 2025

| Platform | Followers | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Instagram | 2,846 | 18,835 views in the last 90 days, 30.3% from non-followers<br>2,484 accounts reached<br>27% of audience in last 30 days is from Ross |
| Facebook | 3,302 | 72,627 views in the last 90 days<br>26,007 accounts reached<br>73.4% of followers are women & 53.1% of followers are women aged 35 to 64<br>32.9% of followers are from Ross |
| X | 7,646 Followers | |
| Website | - | 8.2k visitors in the last 90 days |

## SWOT analysis

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|---|---|
| Annual Christmas Fayre is well established<br>High percentage of businesses in the Town Centre are independent<br>Wide variety of outdoor activities e.g. annual walking festival, canoeing, golf | Visit Ross-on-Wye website could be revamped<br>No access via train station<br>Confusion among residents of RTC/HCC responsibilities<br>Pedestrian/tourist signage including fingerposts are outdated<br>Weak public involvement with campaigns/projects |

| | |
|---|---|
| Culture of hedgehogs, Gilpin, Mott the Hoople etc that have influenced events and activities<br>Housing developments are attracting new residents<br>Market House restoration and Made in Ross offers a central point for events and tourism<br>Wide variety of charity shops that encourage visits to the town centre<br>Access to Place Informatics has been helpful in assessing the impact of new events<br>Access to and inclusion in long-distance walking trails e.g. Herefordshire Trail, Wye Valley Walk<br>Ross Trails app | Anti-social behaviour<br>No dedicated Tourist Information Centre<br>Town Centre is sloped, making holding events and markets difficult |
| **OPPORTUNITIES** | **THREATS** |
| Create branding for weekly markets<br>Explore new methods of social media promotion to reach younger audiences<br>Dog friendly town but needs to be better promoted<br>Promotion of local business through award schemes<br>Work towards an 'in Bloom' award | Markets in surrounding areas are more accessible via public transport for day trips and more popular with traders<br>Decline of river environment will impact outdoor tourism |

## Types of visitors Ross caters to and our target audience

Ross has little nightlife, limited public transport and visitor attractions in a walkable distance to cater to young adults and international visitors.

Scenic views, community feeling and markets attract smaller groups or lone travellers on weekend breaks, family holidays and outdoor activity trips.

# Measuring impact

| Indicator of improvement | Measurement |
|---|---|
| Increased following on Visit Ross social media accounts, with a larger percentage of followers and engagement being from beyond Herefordshire | Tourism & Events Officer to continue tracking following on Visit Ross social media accounts and feedback analysis to RTA and CMT meetings |

| | |
|---|---|
| Place Informatics reports to show higher monthly and unique footfall, with a higher percentage of footfall being from our Tertiary catchment (over 25 miles away) to demonstrate increase tourism rather than increased footfall from locals | Tourism & Events Officer to continue tracking data in monthly Market Town report and feedback analysis to CMT meetings |
| Frequent positive feedback on events | Annual event survey to be completed in January to inform upcoming event schedule and town event budget allocation |
| Increased number of overnight stays and longer stays | Accommodation providers being busier |

## Annual RTC event calendar

Weekly markets on a Thursday and Saturday, organised by the Town Council, will continue to be held under the Market House and on the Market apron.

The event calendar below is subject to change depending on public feedback, Place Informatics reports, etc.

| Month | Event | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| February | Half term activities | |
| March | Health & Wellbeing market | |
| April | Easter Market & Bunny Bake-Off (date subject to national calendar) | Partial road closure to the top of Broad Street |
| May | | |
| June | Vegan Market | Partial road closure to the top of Broad Street |
| July | Proms in the Park (date subject to Bands in the Park schedule organised by contracted band organiser) | |
| August | Summer Market | Partial road closure to the top of Broad Street |
| September | Continental Food Market (subject to review by Communities, Markets and Tourism sub-committee) | Partial road closure to the top of Broad Street |
| | Outdoor Cinema (subject to review by Communities, Markets and Tourism sub-committee) | |
| October | Half term activities | |
| December | Christmas Fayre (Sunday closest to the 1st of December, month therefore subject to national calendar) | Full closure of Broad Street and partial closure of Station Street |

# Appendix

## 2023 Tourism Strategy SWOT analysis

The following represents an overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relating to Ross-on-Wye as acknowledged at the CM&T meeting in November 2022.

## STRENGTHS

- Strong history of tourism
- Market town status / regular markets
- Strong culture ie Gilpin, hedgehogs, riverside tours
- Retail / independent shops
- Outdoor activities - river, walking, golf, fishing
- Riverside - picturesque, linear arboretum
- Innovative - Museum Without Walls
- Easily accessible by car, coach, bus
- Community ie friendly, vibrant voluntary network
- Town ambassadors
- RTC amenities eg Market House & Bandstand
- Wide range of activities for weekenders or long stays
- Dog / muddy boot friendly

## WEAKNESSES

- Crime
- Access ie no train station
- River - pollution / environmental / political concern
- Maintenance - dirty streets, litter
- Herefordshire Council / local confusion of asset ownership
- Reputation of Town Council - with residents and local traders
- Signage / finger signs - old, out of date
- Eating/drinking out - more quality restaurants/bars
- Hotels (reduced options)

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Families / children - PGL
- Shopping trends - shop local / support indie / eco friendly
- Businesses - team building events etc
- Weddings - Market House & Bandstand
- Coach parties ie sustainable travel / demographic
- Youth / younger demographic
- Social media - supporting local businesses / potential for positive PR & 'good news' stories
- Housing developments - attracting new residents into town centre (families / young people / kids)
- Branding, to create a strong USP
- Improving communication with residents & local traders
- Promote dog friendly / muddy boot friendly

## THREATS

- River - demise will impact heavily on tourism
- Predicted economic downturn
- Community, residents, visitor feedback = bad PR
- Negative visitor experiences eg local youth intimidation, vandalism
- Markets - better ones elsewhere
- Covid - ongoing strains / isolating

## Tourism Strategy 2023-26 action plan

| ACTION | LEAD | TIMESCALE | OUTCOME |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Signposting (funding dependent):**<br><br>- Review town centre and local walk signage and signposting with input from Walkers are Welcome for e.g. John Kyrle and Buggy walks<br><br>- Contact Herefordshire Council to advise on process<br><br>- Assess costings and develop budget to refresh / reinstate<br><br>- Source / assess additional funding streams where possible | CM&T / Amenities | End 2023 | Project split into 2 phases<br><br>Phase 1 from Mar – Aug 2025 |
| **Events:** develop a year-long event plan to celebrate Ross-on-Wye's heritage, music and arts along with publicity strategy:<br><br>- Music in the Marketplace (throughout year / specific months or markets)<br><br>- Hedgehog Festival (Winter / Feb) – **Feb 2024**<br><br>- St George's Day (Spring / April) – **April 2024**<br><br>- May Fair (Spring / May) – **May 2024**<br><br>- Yarnbombing (Summer / June) – **June 2023**<br><br>- Summer Market (vintage / vegan / specialist food)? (Summer / July) - **2023**<br><br>- Summer Sounds in the Marketplace (Summer / Aug) - **2023** | CM&T / JM | By project / ongoing | Vegan market and Christmas Fayre continued in 2024 & 25<br><br>Other market & event themes were agreed based on office capacity & public survey results |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| - Clayfest & Equinox Festival (Autumn / Sept) - **2023**<br><br>- Christmas Fayre (Winter / Nov) - **2023** | | | |
| **Weddings:** investigate viability of hosting weddings at Market House and Bandstand where RTC would hire out the spaces to generate revenue.<br><br>- Research costs and licences required<br><br>- Create a preferred supplier list promoting local businesses as part of the wedding package for anyone renting the spaces.<br><br>- Develop digital marketing materials to showcase what Ross-on-Wye and surrounding area has to offer and work alongside marketing partners to promote. | CM&T / JM | By June 2024 | TEO explored this in Feb 2025 and found only the council chambers could be used as a registered venue for legal ceremonies |
| **Markets:**<br><br>- Develop a recognisable Ross-on-Wye Markets brand<br>- Support Markets Working Group with strategy and marketing ideas to increase footfall at our regular weekly markets - **ongoing** | CM&T / JM | Ongoing | Discounted to pitch costs for new traders has been introduced to Market Charges |
| **Wellbeing**:<br><br>- Develop marketing strategy differentiating Ross from other market towns, focusing on outdoors, wellbeing activities and promoting the 'staying safe' message post-pandemic<br><br>- Equinox Festival | CM&T / JM | 2024-2025 | TEO organised activities for May 2025 mental health awareness week<br><br>Outdoor activities have been considered when organising school holiday activities |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| - Outdoor fitness & activities<br>- Local yoga retreats<br>- Promote use of Bandstand and Market House for practitioners<br>- Summer Wellbeing Market (classes, demos, healthy food/drink, music)<br>- PR/messaging: local qualified spokespeople<br>- Promote actively via UK wide tourism organisations & partners | | | |
| **River / Environment:**<br>- Develop marketing strategy promoting the River Wye and associated activities to encourage visitors to the riverside and to position Ross TC as engaging with and caring about its environment<br>- Engage with local organisations – Angling Club, Environment Agency etc<br>- Identify companies locally and around the UK specialising in outdoor packages and engage with them to sell in Ross-on-Wye as an outdoor pursuit destination. | CM&T / JM | 2023-2026 | No action |